

## Chapter 141 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I wait a long time before going down to Kent's room tonight, not really knowing how to play this. Because what I do know is that I want to know more about what he was saying with Alessi, and what the hell is going on, and who might be planning whatever attack is coming, and why he's not taking it seriously.

But what I don't know...is how the hell I'm going to get him to tell me all that.

As I walk through the cold basement passage, I consider that, well...there's always sex?

But I scowl, knowing that Kent has a tendency to wipe my own brain clean of any useful thoughts or suspicion way more often than I do his, so if I go that route, I'll probably forget I even had a question...

And I guess there's always...asking him bluntly?

But as I climb the stone steps, I just shake my head, knowing that Kent has already told me to stay out of it. So by the time I give a little knock on the door and press it open, peeking my head through, I've still got no plan.

I guess I'm just...winging this.

Kent smiles at me from his bed where he's reading a book, already in his "pajamas," which just means he's in his underwear.

"Fay," he says, starting to stand up. "I was beginning to think you weren't coming down."

I smile at him, waving for him to sit back down, which he does. "I like to keep an air of mystery about myself," I say breezily, moving to his side of the bed and perching primly on the edge as I brush my hair airily off my shoulder. "Don't want to become predictable, after all."

"I wouldn't mind it," Kent murmurs, his eyes moving slowly over me as he reaches out a hand to brush softly over my hair, "if I was able to predictably count on you being in my bed every night."

"Aren't you though?" I ask, leaning forward and wrinkling my nose at him. "I mean, I've come down every night for weeks, haven't I?"

“Yes,” he murmurs, taking my hand and pulling me forward a little bit so that my face is closer to his, so that he can place his palm on my cheek and run his thumb over my lower lip. “But eventually I’ll run out of enticements for you, Fay. And you’ll get bored, and stay upstairs with Daniel, keeping your secrets.” He hisses the last word, his mouth twitching up into a little smile.

I laugh into his face, leaning forward to press a quick kiss to his mouth. “You really hate that we have a secret that you don’t know, don’t you?”

“Secrets are my business, Fay,” Kent sighs, tossing his book aside before reaching out to wrap his arms around me, gathering me closer so that I’m sitting warm in his lap. “You two make a fraud of me if there are secrets in my own house.”

“Trying to make me feel guilty,” I say, shaking my head at him and tapping him on the nose. “Not going to work. If you want to know who Daniel’s boyfriend is, you can ask him.”

“Why would I do that,” Kent murmurs, starting to drop kisses down my neck that he knows I can’t resist. I bite my lip, doing my best to deny the warmth that’s starting to build in my belly and my core. “When I can just seduce it out of you?”

I gasp at this, at the gall of him, smacking lightly at him and laughing until he pulls away, laughing himself.

“Hypocrite!” I gasp, shaking my head at him with a big smile on my face. “It’s not like you don’t have secrets from us.”

“What?” he says, still laughing though his smile falters a bit. “What secrets do I have from you?”

“Well, for instance,” I say, raising my eyebrows at him. “Whatever it is that you were talking about with Alessi today, in your office.”

Kent’s face drops then, going suddenly cold. “What?”

“In your office,” I push, though a new anxiety wipes my own smile from my face. “Something about...a shipment, and a delivery. And the police not knowing?”

Kent draws away from me then, his arms going slack as he stares at me. “Were you...were you listening in on me? On my private conversation, Fay?”

I hesitate, blushing and looking down at the sheets. “The door was...open...a little bit...”

My heart starts to pound as Kent folds his arms over his chest, letting me fall out of his lap to land awkwardly against the sheets. “Seriously, Fay?” he asks. “The door wasn’t completely closed, and you took that as an...invitation?”

“We were walking by,” I murmur, still looking down at the blankets. “We couldn’t help but hear...”

“Who?” he asks, his voice sharp now, making me look up at him. “Who was walking by?”

“Me and Daniel,” I answer, my own voice mostly a whisper now.

“Is that all?” he snaps, staring hard at me.

“Yes,” I say, sitting up straight and starting to get mad at the accusation behind his words. “Kent, I’m not lying to you. I just wanted to know –“

“I already told you, Fay,” Kent sighs, starting to stand up from the bed. “You don’t need to know – I’ll tell you what you need to know –“

“Kent!” I exclaim, getting up on my knees as he stands up from the bed and turns away from me. “Seriously, Kent! You’re being unfair!”

He turns to me, anger flashing in his expression, the private Kent I’ve come to know in this room erased in favor again for the Mafia King. “I never promised to be fair, Fay. To protect you? Yes. To provide a home for you? Yes. To let you into my inner dealings? My work?” He just shakes his head and heads towards his closet, clearly pissed off.

“Kent!” I yell, angry and worried now. I climb off the bed and follow after him.

“Go back to bed, Fay,” Kent growls, flicking on the light and heading into the closet, pulling some clothes off of a shelf.

“Kent,” I say again, my voice plaintive now, which makes him look at me. I lean against the doorframe, my arms wrapped around my waist, letting him see the fear and worry all over me. “Kent, I lied to you this morning.”

He is angry again instantly, opening his mouth to yell at me again, but I interrupt.

“I didn’t lose sleep because of Natalia’s cooking,” I snap. “I lost sleep because I had horrible nightmares about you getting shot – and Daniel laying dead in a pool of his own blood.”

Kent clenches his jaw at this and I can see him resisting the urge to come comfort me, to wrap his arms around me. He wants to stay mad – because if he can do that, he doesn’t have to tell me anything.

“I can’t let you die like this,” I whisper, shaking my head, my fear bleeding through my determination. “Please, Kent, I want to help – if you just tell me –“

But it's the wrong thing to say. Kent's face locks down again and he turns away from me to pull on a pair of pants before grabbing for a sweater. "I told you, Fay," he says, his words clipped. "I've got this under control. You don't need to do anything."

He glares at me after pulling the sweater over his head, tugging it down over his chest and stomach.

"Seriously?" I ask, as he stalks towards me, deliberately not moving from my place blocking the door. "I'm just supposed to sit around, looking pretty? Waiting for you to call me down to your room so we can fuck?"

"Precisely," Kent hisses down into my face. I blink at him for a moment, not comprehending, and then my jaw drops open as I realize what he just said.

And then I can't do anything but stare at him.

Kent takes a deep breath and looks beyond me into the room. "Move, Fay," he orders.

I don't budge, still staring at him in shock, in humiliation, in...well, in shame, I realize quite suddenly.

Because Kent has just made it very, very clear that I am only his little pet, his mafia mistress. I shake my head at him, knowing that it's deeper than that, but absolutely wounded by what he said.

And, cowed by him, mortified at the insult, I do as he says. I move aside.

Kent strides into the room, grabbing his phone and his wallet off his bedside table. He doesn't look at me again as he strides back to me, and then past me, headed for the door to his office. I watch him go, completely shocked.

And then tears start in my eyes as I hear the door to his office slam.

I stand there, alone, for a long time, not wanting to touch my emotions. Not wanting to...to think, at all, about how my relationship maybe just fell apart.

But after a while, I start to get cold.

And I realize how exhausted I am.

And that I can't stand here all night.

I glance towards the door to the passage but realize immediately that that's not a choice, because Daniel's up in my room, asleep in my bed, and I don't...I don't want him to ask me what's wrong.

So I look towards Kent's bed, and consider that...I can't go there either. Because I can't think of anything more humiliating than laying in his bed, waiting for him to come back.

But there's...there's no where else to go.

So, I sigh and cross the room to the big chairs nestled close to the fire, picking my book up from my nightstand as I go. And I curl up in the chair that has its back turned more towards the bed, hoping that Kent won't notice me in it.

And then I start to read, trying to block out the world, my feelings, my life.

When I fall asleep a few hours later, Kent still hasn't come back.

## Chapter 142 – Cold Pride

# Chapter 142 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I jump awake at the sound of the alarm clock, gritting my teeth and hating that thing. But it's silenced almost immediately and I raise my hand to rub at my eyes, feeling cramped and horrible and terribly sad after my night alone in this stupid chair.

But as I start to come awake I notice that there's a blanket laid across me – my favorite thick, velvety red throw blanket that I definitely hadn't spread over myself before I fell asleep.

Realizing what must have happened, I turn to peek around the corner of the chair and see Kent on the edge of his bed, one foot on the ground and the other leg bent in front of him as he stares down at the clock in his hands, unmoving.

I watch him for a minute, taking in the hunch of his shoulders, the way his head hangs.

And part of me wants to feel victorious about it, but the only thing I actually feel is a great deal of sadness to see him looking so terribly unhappy. But as he starts to move, I pull my face back, not wanting...I don't know.

To face him? To let him win? To be the first one to reach out and apologize?

Because what he said to me last night was incredibly shitty. And I haven't forgiven him for it. And I don't want to be comforting him if he can't even muster up the energy to apologize.

I can be just as stubborn as he can, after all.

So I curl back up in the chair, pressing my eyes shut and pretending I slept through the alarm. Even though that's an impossibility.

I hear Kent place the alarm clock back on his side table, and then I hear his soft footsteps come over to my chair, but I do my best to stay perfectly still, pretending to be asleep. If he wants to talk to me, he can damn well wake me up.

Kent pauses next to me, and I can hear him inhale a deep breath and then sigh it out.

And then, to my shock, I hear him walk away.

My eyes flash open and I peek around the chair again, watching him disappear into his closet, getting ready for the day. And he doesn't even look my way again as he changes into his suit and then heads through the door to his office.

And, as I watch him leave me alone again without a word, my heart sinks. And I really start to worry.

Have I...have I lost him?

Is this seriously the end of this?

I uncurl myself from my horrible little bed, not bothering to neatly fold the blanket the way I know Kent would prefer and instead leaving it in a heap on the chair. Then I head through the secret door and mope through the passage, my eyes on my feet, feeling terrible and lonely and worried.

Worried that I've lost him. Worried that we're all going to die.

I sigh as I come through the wardrobe into my room, glancing at my bed to see that Daniel is still, predictably, asleep. But there could be one bright light on my horizon...

I head directly for my desk, pulling open the top drawer and grabbing my phone, flicking the screen on with my thumb.

And my jaw drops again when I see that...

That Ivan hasn't responded. Not a single word.

And then I sink down into my desk chair, completely overwhelmed, burying my face in my palm and working hard to take deep breaths.

Seriously?

Nothing?

Nothing from Kent? Nothing from Ivan? Nothing from either of them?

Have I seriously lost both of my boyfriends in a forty-eight-hour period?

And, as tears start to stream down my face, I make myself stand up and go into my bathroom where I turn on the water for a very hot shower. Then, after I strip off my clothes, I sit down in the middle of the tiled floor, right above the drain, right where the water can pound against my back as I cry my eyes out.

---

I'm the first one to crack.

I thought I could be stubborn. I thought I could be cold.

But two whole days pass with Kent ignoring me completely, and as night falls at the end of that second day I'm an absolute mess.

And I guess...well, ignoring me completely isn't quite right. Kent has given me every opportunity to give in, or to apologize, or to tell him that he's right, or to agree to his terms in our relationship. He has created opportunities for me to agree to the idea that he has all the power and I'm not allowed to ask any questions.

At breakfast yesterday and today, Kent came and placed my plate in front of me, as he always does. And then he leaned back, crossing his arms over his chest, and stared at me.

Which pissed me off. A lot. So both mornings, I just pushed the plate of food away and picked up my coffee, ignoring him and having a liquid breakfast before driving myself to the stables and spending all day there alone with Healthcliff. Both days I stayed until it was dark, until Jerome came and got me, shaking his head at me and not asking any questions.

Both evenings, as I climbed the stairs, I saw that the door to Kent's office was open, which it never is at this time, and that the lights were on, which they never are. And I could hear him moving around in there.

It might not be obvious to anyone else in the house, but to me the invitation is clear: I'm here, if you're ready to give in.

But until now, until I've been sitting on my bed staring angrily at the wall for forty-five minutes, I've been able to resist.

"Okay," Daniel says, clapping his hands and making me jump and look at him. "What is wrong with you, Fay?" he asks, shaking his head at me in wonder.

"Your dad's a dick." I answer sharply, turning away from him to stare at the wall again.

“Yeah,” he says, frustrated. “No shit, Fay. What did he do?”

“Nothing.” I snap, not wanting to bring him into this.

“Seriously?” Daniel asks, coming to sit next to me. “He did nothing?”

“I already told you,” I say, turning to look at him, my face expressionless. “He was a dick.”

Daniel shakes his head at me slowly. “I believe you, Fay,” he says after a minute. “But if you two are playing some kind of game of chicken here? Each waiting for the other one to apologize first?” Slowly, he shakes his head. “You are not going to win.”

I glare at Daniel, newly renewed in my determination to literally never speak to Kent ever again if that’s what this takes.

Daniel correctly interprets the expression on my face and just laughs at me a little, patting my leg before standing up and heading for the bathroom, probably to take a shower. “I’m serious, Fay,” he says as he goes. “If you think you’re stubborn? Kent’s got 10 times what you’ve got. You are not going to win.”

I turn to look at him, hoping to hell he’s not right. Because I...I can’t take this much longer.

Especially if we’re all going to die this week, according to Ivan. Is this seriously how we’re going to spend our final days, when we could be doing something to prevent this? I sigh, exhausted, worried, overwhelmed.

“Apologize, Fay,” Daniel says, pausing by the door and shaking his head at me. “Even if you don’t mean it. Kent just wants you to crack first. He’ll give in.”

“How do you know that?” I ask, shaking my head at Daniel. “Has ever done that for you?”

“No,” Daniel says with a shrug before passing into the bathroom. “But he’s not obsessed with me.”

My mouth falls open to ask what the hell he means by that, but the door closes before I can ask anything.

And then, acting more on my desire to stop feeling so incredibly horrible than anything else, I stand up and move immediately to my wardrobe. There, I pull together an outfit that doesn’t really make sense. There’s a lingerie body suit in here, all sheer except for black satin panels over the breasts which barely come up to cover my nipples.

Because if I’m going to eat crow in front of Kent? I’m damn well going to look good while I do it.



And then I pull a pair of jeans on over the body suit, because I have to walk through the house – and I can't...well, I can't walk through the house in my underwear.

I pull on a pair of black heels without letting myself think too much about the whole look. Then, stopping only for a little bit of eyeliner and to run a brush through my hair, I slip out of my door and hurriedly walk down the stairs, trying to make as little noise as possible.

Chapter 143 – Surprise Visitor

## Chapter 143 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

My eyes go immediately to the door of Kent's office at the bottom of the stairs, which is – as I hoped – still standing wide open, light spilling out of it. When I get to the landing I cross to the door as quietly as I can, peeking inside.

He's there, as I knew he'd be, though he's never in there this late. Kent is giving me every opportunity to do precisely what I'm doing: swallowing my pride. I watch him as he leans over his desk, looking at something on his computer, his face turned a little away from me.

And, still a little angry that he's making me do this, I lean myself against his door frame, my arms crossed over my chest, and I wait.

Kent glances towards the door as he turns his face away from his computer and he freezes a little when he sees me standing there in silence. And then, slowly, he gets to his feet, slipping his hands into his pockets, leveling his gaze at me.

And I stare right back, setting my jaw, staring at him.

Because I'm the one who made the first move - I came down here, after all. I swallowed my pride. He can damn well meet me halfway and say the first word.

But he doesn't. Kent just stares at me.

And as he does, I just start to...collapse, inside.

Seriously? I think, my heart breaking a little. Seriously? Me groveling – that's so much more important than everything? Than – than all of this? Than us? Whatever we are?

And I feel my face fall as my eyes go wide and fill with tears. As I stare at him, and my lip starts to tremble, and my knees start to go weak at the realization that...

That I might mean absolutely nothing to this man. Absolutely nothing at all...

And then he cracks too.

“Fay,” Kent says, his voice breaking as he takes one step towards me, reaching out a hand –

And it’s all I need.

I’m moving in an instant, slamming the door shut behind me, crossing the room in a flash and hurling myself in his arms, which wrap tight around me – desperate –

“Fay,” he groans, holding me to him like he can’t ever let me go, tucking his head down against mine, his fingers gripping tightly against the skin of my back.

“I hate this, Kent,” I sob, burying my face against his chest, letting my pride fly away, wrapping my fingers in the cloth of his shirt as if I could tear it to pieces. “I – I don’t want this – I can’t stand it – you can’t hate me, you can’t –“

“Fay,” Kent says harshly, pulling back from me a little so that he can look down into my face – but I don’t let him, not wanting him to see me all red and blotchy. But he says my name again, taking his hand from my back and sliding it under my chin, forcing me to look up at him so that he can see all of me, so that he can see the tears streaming down my face.

So that I can see all of him. So that I can see his heart breaking as he watches me cry.

“Fuck, Fay,” he says, his voice catching, “I don’t hate you – I couldn’t –“

And I gasp a little in relief, pressing my eyes shut as he gathers me to him again. “I’m sorry,” I hear him whisper, his arms tightening around me, holding me closer – if that’s even possible – “I was just so mad – and so stubborn – and so were you, Fay, and I couldn’t...I’m sorry, Fay,” he says, rueful, apparently not able to come up with new words.

But I understand. I get it, I really do.

“I’m sorry too,” I murmur, sniffing, my voice thick with my crying. “I should – I should trust you –“

“No, what I said was unforgivable,” he murmurs against my hair.

“Well, yeah,” I say, whipping my head up to glare at him a little while I wipe at my face, an act that makes him smile in relief. I think he’s more comfortable with me mad than he is with me sobbing. “Seriously, Kent?” I ask, taking his lapels in my hand, “is that what you think of me, what you want from me? To just sit around and look pretty and wait for you to –“

“No, Fay,” he says, taking my face in his hands and shaking his head. “That was...horrible. I didn’t mean it. That’s not what I think and not what I want. I should trust you more too. I’m sorry.”

And then I'm nodding, accepting it, understanding that we both regret everything about the past two days, and then I'm on my toes, reaching for him, and he understands, because a moment later his mouth is on mine – hard, and fast, and desperate.

It only takes a second for Kent to lean down before he has an arm under my ass, lifting me up so that I wrap my legs around his waist, and then he takes a step forward to seat me on his desk –

Things move fast from there, everything a blur as Kent kisses me deeper, hungrier than I've felt him in weeks, his mouth never leaving mine but somehow – and I have no idea how – managing to pull my pants down from my hips, to unbuckle his belt and push his own pants down –

And I want it – want every moment of it, because this – this is always where Kent and I have come together. No matter what our fight, or our tension, our physical connection has always allowed us to find steady ground.

So it isn't even a question for me when I reach down between us to take Kent's heavy, hard cock in my hands, to guide it towards my core, to press him closer to me by tightening the leg that's still looped around his hip –

Because I want him –

Now.

Hard, and fast, and thick –

Kent groans and shudders as he sinks into me, as he begins to pulse –

But both of us freeze in an instant as we hear the knock at the door.

And then our eyes flash immediately to the knob which, to our horror, begins to turn.

“Fuck,” Kent hisses, immediately pulling out of me and yanking me off the desk as my panic sets in, as the door begins to swing open –

Because I didn't fucking lock it, did I? –

And then, to my shock, Kent presses his hands down on my shoulders, hard – forcing me to my knees –

And then he throws himself into his chair, rolling it forward to where I'm sitting –

And then he kicks me – actually kicks me –

But suddenly, as I hear the door creak fully open – I understand.

And I crawl backwards, as fast and as silently as I can, tucking myself into the hollow under Kent's desk as he rolls the chair forward, his knee pressed uncomfortably up against my face.

But I don't protest because I know that tucked under like this – as long as whoever is coming in doesn't come around to his side of the desk – they can't see me, or the fact that he's sitting in his chair half naked.

I've barely tucked myself under the desk when I hear the door stop its creaking.

My heart pounds as I hear footsteps cross the room halfway.

"Ah, Kent," Alessi says, making my breath catch in my throat. "Up late tonight, are we?"

## Chapter 144 – Secrets Overheard

# Chapter 144 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I cover my mouth with my hand, my fingers brushing against Kent's bare knee pressed against my face, desperate to hush the sound of my panting breath.

A string of obscenities flies through my head as I press my eyes shut, praying frantically that Alessi didn't see me – that he doesn't peek around the side of Kent's desk and see him sitting in his desk chair with no pants on.

Next to me, Kent's leg begins to shake and tremble. And I know he has precisely the same fear.

"Not so late, Alessi," Kent sighs, and I'm shocked to hear how composed he sounds, especially as I'm almost gasping with fear down here.

"Eh, perhaps I just remember you from our youth in Italy," Alessi says fondly, "always early to bed for Kent. But yes." A pause here, and I imagine him giving a casual shrug, "perhaps things have changed."

"What can I help you with, Alessi?" Kent says, snapping a little. I go even more still now, hoping that he doesn't piss Alessi off. He needs to get him out of here – as fast as he can – not to start a fight.

"Just coming to speak with my brother-in-law," Alessi murmurs, his voice a bit more sly than I'm used to. "Natalia is very...eager. To have things settled with you. Have you considered her offer?"

I hear movement and open my eyes, shifting my gaze to the line of light that comes in between the floor and barrier of the desk against which I am currently pressed. I see a shadow darken the line and then the creaking of a chair. I again curse inwardly. Alessi has sat down.

Which means he's staying awhile.

Shit.

Well, at least he didn't move around the desk...yet.

My eyes dart towards Kent when he speaks again, but I close my eyelids then rather than staring at the long length of his leg that presses against me. "No, Alessi," Kent sighs. "I've already told her – marriage is not something I'm thinking about anytime in the near future. It's just – not on the table for me."

"But Natalia –"

"Is a wonderful woman," Kent interrupts smoothly before pausing and, I assume, giving Alessi a dark glare. "But even if she was the most wonderful woman, it's simply...not in the cards."

He sighs. "It would make my father very happy," he says slowly, "to renew the ties between our families."

"Is Daniel not enough of a tie?" Kent asks, his voice sharp.

"Daniel is a wonderful boy, we love him very much," Alessi says smoothly. "But he is...not as involved in the business as we would like. And if he continues to be unattached to the Lippert business, then it would be better for us to...renew the ties in another way."

There's a long pause. "I'm not going to marry her," Kent says, his voice quiet and blunt. "So, if we need to make a tie, then we have to do it another way."

"Well," Alessi says on a deep intake of breath. "I understand. But perhaps...we need to make some changes, then."

"Is it not enough?" Kent asks, and I can tell that he's starting to lose his temper now.

"Everything else that we've done? The money flows into Italy – I know how much we've brought in for you –"

"It is not about the money," Alessi snaps. "It is about the trust."

"I have never done anything to defy your trust," Kent growls.

"You kept the Alden girl," Alessi points out. "When we told you to let her go."

Kent just sighs now and I feel him shift in his seat, leaning back in exasperation. “It’s the right call,” he says, his voice clipped. “You should trust me on that.”

“Well, time will tell,” Alessi says conversationally, and my eyes widen when I see the shadows at the edge of the desk shift and hear the creak of his chair. He’s getting up. I hear the sound of his footsteps moving away and start to exhale a deep breath.

“Ah, Kent,” Alessi says, apparently turning back. “The shipment that you arranged. Of the goods. It will be delivered? Shortly?”

“Yes,” Kent says, his whole body going tense suddenly. “The shipment is arranged. I got word tonight that it should arrive in Sicily in two days’ time.”

“Ah!” Alessi says, laughing a little, apparently pleased. “This is wonderful, Kent. We will be...very pleased, to be able to bring this new business to Italy. It will be quite lucrative, for us to be able to get a foot in this different game.”

“Yes,” Kent snaps, clearly eager for him to go.

“Although, messy, yes?” Alessi continues, and I curse again mentally when I hear his footsteps turn back towards us. “We will have to have some discussions about the fallout, and how you Americans handle this trade. In fact, it might be better if you were to send some men home with us so that they can teach us some methods for distribution and...well, clean up. From the inevitable cost to human life.”

My eyes go wide as I listen to his words. What? What the hell were they getting into?

“You’ll have them,” Kent says quickly, apparently willing to promise anything to get Alessi out of here. “I’ll arrange it tonight and dedicate the men this morning. All right?”

“Of course, of course!” Alessi says, and I hear his footsteps move leisurely towards the door. “You will let me know, eh?”

Kent doesn’t say anything, but I presume he nods, because Alessi says his goodnights and then, apparently, passes through the door. When I hear the door creak closed and then click shut, I let out a huge sigh of relief, echoed by Kent’s own.

He pushes back in his chair, making a little more space for me, but to my surprise he doesn’t get up.

“You can come out now, Fay,” Kent murmurs, and I crawl out from beneath the desk, looking up at him from the floor on my hands and knees.

“Are you all right?” I ask, a little breathless. “Did he – did he know?”

“I don’t know,” Kent replies, sighing. “I don’t think he did – but – then why did he speak in English the whole time...?”

I awkwardly stand up, not knowing what to say, my mind whirring over everything that I heard. “Kent...” I say quietly as I lean down and grab my pants off the floor, leaning back against the desk as I start to pull them back on. The mood’s dead, anyway - I might as well be warm. “What was Alessi saying? About a deal?”

Kent sighs again, harder this time, and pushes himself to his feet, pulling up his own pants and hastily buckling his belt. “Don’t worry about it, Fay.”

“What?” I ask, a little shocked. Honestly – after everything we just said to each other about trusting each other – and how he doesn’t want me to just sit back and look pretty –

“Seriously, Kent?” I ask, standing up straight and fastening the button at the top of my jeans. “You’re just...not going to tell me?”

“You don’t need to know, Fay,” he growls, turning to glare at me.

“It sounded serious!”

“It is serious!” he counters, taking a step closer, trying to intimidate me into shutting up.

I clench my jaw, glaring up at him, slowly shaking my head back and forth. “What’s going on, Kent?” I ask, crossing my arms over my chest. “Methods of distribution? The inevitable cost to human life? What the hell are you getting into?”

Kent stands close to me now, glowering fiercely down into my eyes. But I don’t budge.

“Is it heroin, Kent?” I ask quietly. “Are you trying to get in on Ivan’s game? Take it from him?”

“Seriously?” Kent hisses. “This is about Ivan now? You’re worried I’m going to take his livelihood from him?”

“No, Kent!” I almost shout, and he grabs my arm, glancing towards the door and hissing at me to lower my voice. I do lower it, but I keep going. “No, this is about you being involved in a business that kills people!”

Kent snaps his gaze back to me then and drops my arm, laughing a little as he takes a step back, giving me a nasty little smirk. “Fay...how, precisely, do you think I afforded all of this? The clothes you wear, the horse you ride? Your sister’s beach house? What do you think I do?”

## Chapter 145 – Profit from Pain

## Chapter 145 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

My mouth drops a little at the blunt way that Kent basically admits that...that he kills people. Maybe every day. For money.

I think back, suddenly, to the day after I met Kent – when I sat on my couch with my little laptop perched on my knees, googling him, seeing all of the legitimate businesses he had started and invested in...

And as I stare at him I realize that...

I mean, I know that Kent is the Mafia King, I know that that's his reputation. But honestly...I've never really seen any of it except that one time I saw him punch a man in the basement. But I have no idea what that was about – and I have no idea what he really does all day.

And I think...well, I think I didn't ask a lot of questions because I don't want to know. But also, when I imagined the work Kent was doing, it was more...legitimate work than the shooting and stabbing and murder that you see in Mafia movies.

And maybe...maybe that's all he wanted me to see.

I stare at him, starting to piece it together – that Kent, even though he told me his days of back-alley brawls are done, is still very much in that world. That even if he is himself not getting his hands dirty...that doesn't mean he's not paying others to do it for him.

Kent watches me as I go a little pale. As I step away from him.

“Seriously?” I whisper. “Is that – is that really what you do?”

“I never hid it, Fay,” Kent says evenly, his entire face stern and cold. “I never asked you to think I was a good man.”

And I stare back at him, wondering if...wondering if that's something I can handle. Something I'm okay with.

But I definitely need more details before I can make that decision.

“Tell me, Kent,” I say, my voice starting to waver a little as I raise my chin and make my demand. “I need to know. I need to know everything.”

“You don't need to know anything –“ he scoffs, crossing his arms in frustration.



“I do!” I snap, looking at him hard. “I need to know, Kent, whether I can do this. I need to know who I’m –“ I hesitate now, because – well, because I’m not in a relationship with him, am I? “Who I’m sleeping with,” I finish, working hard to hold his eye.

“Fay,” Kent says, taking a few steps closer to me. “You don’t need to know the details – nothing has changed. You’ll be safer if you don’t –“

“Why don’t you trust me?” I break in, shaking my head at him, suddenly realizing that we’re back where we started - that everything that passed between us before Alessi came into the room – it was all bullshit.

Just Kent telling me what I wanted to hear – so he could...so he could get into my pants. And he did, immediately.

I look down, suddenly ashamed. There is no trust – not really – between us. And I fall for it every time.

“It’s not about trust, Fay,” Kent sighs, closing the distance between us so that he stands very close, so that I can hear his words even though they’re barely a whisper. “It’s about...what you need to know. These details – they are better kept between a very small group of people –“

“And I can’t be part of that group?” I ask bitterly, anger starting to burn in my chest.

“You don’t need to be part of that group,” Kent insists.

But I just look up and shake my head at him, unable to accept it. “This is it, Kent,” I say quietly, determined. “Either you tell me or...” I breathe out sharply, realizing that I need the ultimatum as it falls from my mouth. “Or I...I have to make changes.”

Kent just glares at me, not liking being backed into a corner, but also I don’t think really understanding what I mean.

“I can’t be with someone who doesn’t trust me,” I say as simply as I can, keeping my expression as cold as his. “Either you tell me what you’re getting up to with Alessi, or...I have to go.”

Kent stares at me quietly for a second and then starts to slowly shake his head. “You know, Fay,” he growls, anger clearly coiling in him as well. “That’s precisely what a spy would say. A really sloppy, naive spy.”

It takes a moment for his words to hit me, for me to understand what the hell he just said. And then my eyes narrow in rage, and disappointment, and the desire to honestly rip him to shreds. “If I was a spy Kent,” I hiss, letting that rage burn coldly within me, “Trust me. You’d never see it coming.”

And then I spin away from him, striding towards the door. When my fingers brush the handle Kent barks out my name and I turn to glare at him.

“You can’t go out that way,” he snaps, his arms still crossed over his chest. “You’ll be seen.”

And a really, really big part of me wants to tell him to fuck off and to throw open the door, striding out into the hallway for everyone to see – for Alessi to see that Kent was keeping me in there, hidden, the whole time.

But the other part of me – the part that’s still in this, that wants Kent to trust me...

I drop the knob and, still glaring at him with what pride I have left, stride for the door to his bedroom. But I don’t look at him as I pull the book and pass through, walking quickly through the bedroom and towards the passage.

And then I go through that too, my rage and anger and sadness building in me with every step because...

Fuck.

I think...I think Kent and I just broke up.

Even though we were never really together – not officially, not in any real way outside of his own bedroom –

But I gave Kent the ultimatum. I told him to tell me the truth, to trust me, or I was gone.

And he made his choice.

And I realize the finality of that as I walk through the cold underground passage at the bottom of the house, grief sweeping through me, replacing my rage. By the time I pull myself up the winding staircase to my room, and push through the door in the back of my wardrobe, tears are streaking down my face.

“Fay!” Daniel gasps and I jump a little as I step into my room and see him sitting on my bed. I hadn’t realized that he was here – that he was going to see me like this. “Are you – what’s wrong? What happened?”

“Nothing,” I murmur, hiccupping a little. But I immediately prove this a lie as I start to cry harder. Daniel sighs and comes to wrap his arms around me.

“What did he do?” Daniel asks quietly, angry now. “What did he say to you?”

“Nothing,” I insist, pushing away from him a little, not wanting to talk about it.

“Seriously, Fay – what – “

“Daniel,” I sigh, looking up at him with an honest plea on my face. “I just – I don’t know. I haven’t even processed – I think he broke up with me? But I need...”

Daniel gasps and glares at the door, but I sigh, realizing that...that is not the energy I need. Slowly, I raise a hand to Daniel's cheek and turn his face back to me.

"Can I – Daniel, do you think I can be alone tonight?" I ask softly. "I just want to cry in my bed. Alone. Okay?"

"Are you sure?" he asks softly, his voice all sympathy and concern. "I can come back – bring snacks, wine, we can trash Kent all night –"

I laugh a little despite myself but shake my head. "Honestly, Daniel," I sigh. "I just...want to be alone. I want to go to sleep."

"Okay," Daniel says softly, and as I turn into the bathroom to take a long hot shower, I hear him move to the door.

"I love you, Fay," he calls to me gently. I turn to smile a little at my best friend.

"I know," I reply. "I love you too."

And he quirks one side of his mouth at me before passing through my bedroom door and leaving me alone.

As soon as he goes, the grief hits me like a wall. And I turn the water in the shower to scalding hot, and strip down, and climb in, and sit on the wet tiled floor with my head in my hands.

Wondering what the hell I'm going to do next.

## Chapter 146 – Solitude

# Chapter 146 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I pull myself out of the shower a ridiculously long time later, only really leaving because the water that was falling on my shoulders had grown colder and colder until I was shivering. I towel myself off, shaking my head a little to consider that while I'm all cried out, my tears didn't bring the relief that I thought they would.

Because honestly, I'm still a wreck about this.

I know what I'm supposed to do now, I think as I wrap my big fluffy white robe around myself and pass into my bedroom, sitting down hard on my vanity's stool, still shivering a little. I'm supposed to leave. Kent gave me his answer to my ultimatum – I said I would go if he didn't tell me, and he didn't. So now...

I'm supposed to go.

But god damn it, where to?

And honestly, I'm fully aware of the fact that I don't want to go anywhere. I want to stay right here, with Daniel and with Kent – who are now basically my family. I want to stay here, and work things out, and convince Kent that we can fix this –

But really? Is that even worth my time?

I shake my head at my pale face in the mirror as I start to brush the tangles out of my wet hair, feeling very pathetic. Kent has demonstrated time and time again that he doesn't really trust me, that I'm just...a pleasant distraction for him. One of his many, many mistresses.

Nothing special.

And if I continue to let him treat me like that...

I mean, I know it was part of the contract. But I always thought it was more.

But now that I know it's how he really feels...

Will I ever be able to respect myself again if I continue in a relationship with a man who just views me as a girl who he just considers his pretty little secret? Who comes to his room every night at his beck and call, and to whom he doesn't give anything in return?

I scowl at myself a little when I think this, because I'm fully aware that he has given me things in return – a great deal of money, a horse, a beach house I've never been to –

But nothing...nothing that I really want. Nothing I really care about.

And as I stare at myself in the mirror I make myself say the words I've been avoiding for a long time now.

"I want him," I confess to myself, my voice soft. "All of him."

And then the tears start to slide down my face again as I realize it's not something that's ever been on the table. That I'll never, ever get this thing that I very, very much want.

Not as cried out as I thought I was, I think, looking down at my hands sitting limply in my lap.

I'm still crying a few minutes later when a sharp knock comes up at the door.

To emotionally exhausted to even really be curious, I slowly stand up and cross to the door. When I open it, no one's standing there, but I'm not surprised. I look down, fully expecting to see a little note delivered.

I'm not disappointed.

I pick up the note, bringing it into my room and turning the lock after I close my door. I open the note without even moving to my bed and quickly read the three words printed there in Kent's tiny, precise handwriting.

Come downstairs, Fay.

And I stare at it, desperately wanting to see this as a peace offering, as Kent wanting to talk, to make things right.

But it's not. I know it's not.

Because it's not an apology, is it? Or him taking anything back. Or him demonstrating that he trusts me. It's just him, calling to me, telling me to come to his side. So he can do what he always does – distract me with sex so that I forgive him and move on without a second thought.

But I'm not going to do that anymore.

I crumple the note and throw it in my trashcan, taking a deep breath as I head to bed.

Because if I go downstairs now, Kent will have all the information he needs: that I'm so pathetically desperate for him that I'll come whenever he calls, no matter how much he treats me like untrustworthy trash.

It will be, in its essence, permission for him to keep doing it. Evidence that he can treat me like that, and I'll still come when he calls.

And as I lay down on the bed and flick off my light, I'm a little surprised by myself. Because I didn't realize I had this much pride.

Learning a lot about myself these past few weeks, I think, closing my eyes. And then I do my very best to clear my mind and force myself to sleep, hoping desperately that I'll feel better in the morning. That things will be clearer.

And I almost make it to sleep – am in that half-daze pre-dream state – when I jump to hear the intercom on my wall buzz, which it so rarely does.

"Fay," Kent's voice comes through, stern.

I sit up in bed, surprised, staring at the intercom as if I can see him through it. But I don't get up.

"Damn it, Fay," he growls. "Come downstairs. I want to talk to you."

And I consider it – I honestly do. Because all I want right now is to fly through the house, and through all the doors, and directly into his arms – for him to tell me that it’s okay. That it’s all better.

But I know that it’s not. And I sigh, desperately sad, because nothing has changed. It’s still just Kent snapping his fingers and me running to him, tongue lolling, tail wagging.

And even though I know I’m precisely that desperate, heartsick puppy who wants to come back no matter how many times he kicks me...I shake my head.

Because I just can’t do it. I sigh, looking down into my lap, and then I jump again when I hear the intercom buzz a third time.

“Fay!” he almost shouts, clearly pissed now. And my eyes go wide as I hear him grumble a few frustrated curses, but then the intercom goes silent.

I wait a few seconds for another noise, but when none comes I just sigh and stand up, knowing I’m too shaken to sleep now. So, I move to my wardrobe, and strip off my fluffy robe, and pull on the warmest, comfiest, least sexy pajamas I have – blue flannel, button down, with little stars on them – and crawl back into my bed.

After looping my still-damp hair onto my head in a messy bun, I pick up a book from my nightstand, flick on my reading light, and start to read, trying to wipe thoughts of Kent from my mind.

The book is a good one – I’m quickly engrossed in the romance of it, the quick twists and turns of the plot, the plight of the heroine which is, indeed, quite shocking.

But nothing shocks me more than a sudden noise in my own room.

And my jaw drops open as I hear the door in the back of my wardrobe pop.

And then see the wardrobe’s door slowly press open.

Chapter 147 – Standoff

## Chapter 147 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

My mouth is still hanging open when I see Kent’s dark head and broad shoulders ducking through the open door of my tiny wardrobe.

I’m still staring when he turns to glare at me.

“Are you happy now, Fay?” Kent asks, stern and clearly pissed off.

And that makes me snap my mouth shut as I narrow my eyes at him.

“Do I look happy, Kent?” I ask, waving a hand at myself – at my tear-stained cheeks, my messy hair.

And, well, my cozy pajamas, my book, and my reading light might not be adding to the picture of misery I want him to see at the moment, but I think he gets the point because Kent sighs and presses the bridge of his nose between his fingers.

“Fay,” he sighs. “Why didn’t you come downstairs? I want to talk to you.”

“Because, Kent,” I answer softly. “You already gave me your answer.”

“To what question?” he snaps, looking up at me and clearly working hard to contain his temper.

“To...whether or not you want me in your life.”

“What?” Kent breathes, appalled, leaning forward a little to stare at me like I’m crazy.

“I said,” I explain, starting to get pissed now because I am very aware of what happened downstairs and it makes me insane that he either wasn’t paying attention or is playing dumb now, “that if you don’t trust me, that I have to rethink my place in the world and in your life. And you made it very clear that you don’t trust me! So!” I spread my arms wide, inviting him to figure the rest out himself.

“Fay,” Kent groans, tilting his head back. “I trust you – it’s just –“

“Clearly you don’t!” I declare, crossing my arms, my voice getting unconsciously louder. “Or else you would have told me what the hell you’re getting up to that’s going to cost all of these human lives!”

“Fay!” Kent hisses, slicing a hand through the air in an attempt to silence me and glaring towards the door. “Lower your voice! Someone will hear you!”

I roll my eyes, sinking back into my pillows, sick of being told what to do and when to do it and having to keep quiet in my own bedroom – the one space where I’m supposed to be able to expect to have a little privacy – just to adhere to his rules.

I turn to stare at the wall across from me, not wanting to look at him right now. Because I know that if I do, he’s just going to work his wiles on me and convince me to forgive him.

And continue to treat me like his mistress.

And I...I can’t do that. Not anymore.

I hear Kent sigh and I know that he's looking at me again. I go tense under his gaze.

"Please," he says, a real plea in his voice. But I still don't look at him. "Fay, please," he tries again, and I hear him take another step towards me.

Still, I don't move.

"Fay, I'm sorry –"

"You already said that tonight," I snap, still staring at the wall, not letting myself turn towards him even though every molecule in my body wants to. "And then, at the first test of it, you repeated the exact thing that hurt me most the first time you said it."

"Fay, I didn't –"

"You did!" I snap. "You –"

"Would you let me finish a god damn sentence, Fay?" Kent growls and I snap my head to him then, glaring with every bit of strength I have, forcing myself to hate him when I know I feel precisely the opposite.

"Not if it means letting you off the hook for treating me like I'm just the girl you're fucking, Kent," I say slowly, cruelly, in response. "And not something more. Which we both know I am."

It's a gamble, those words. Because he's never said more – has never told me, explicitly, that he feels anything more for me than just the mistress he signed up for with that stupid contract.

But I know. I know it in my bones.

And right now? He's either going to admit it, or he's going to lose me. Because I can't do it anymore – not when I have it on good authority that someone is coming to kill us all sometime this week. The time for playing coy is over. He either trusts me or he doesn't. We're either in this together?

Or I'm leaving.

I'm not getting killed for someone who doesn't trust me and can't even admit he cares about me.

And as I glare up at him, and he glares back, I know that Kent understands all of it.

We stay in that deadlock for a long time, staring at each other, each waiting for the other to break. But neither does.

Until, to my surprise, Kent shifts his position and looks down at his feet, stepping his right foot on the heel of his left shoe and starting to step out of it.



“What?” I ask, confused, realizing that Kent’s...taking off his shoes? “What are you doing?”

“I’m coming to bed, Fay,” he snaps, looking up at me and renewing his little glare.

“What?” I ask again, still baffled as he shrugs off his suit jacket and hangs it neatly up on a spare hanger in the wardrobe.

But he doesn’t answer me this time, just sighs as he peels back the covers on the other side of the bed – Daniel’s side of the bed, technically – and sits down on the mattress, leaning back against the pile of floral pillows against my headboard.

“Turn off the light,” he says, nodding to my reading light.

But I hesitate, glaring at him a little and grabbing a pillow that I plant staunchly between us like a little wall. Kent glances down at it.

“What’s that for?” he asks.

“So you can’t seduce me,” I grumble, “into being nice to you after you’ve been so mean to me –“

“Is that all it will take to get you to stop being mad at me?” Kent asks, raising an eyebrow at me. “Just, sex?”

“Well, probably!” I answer too quickly, and then bite my lip as I see Kent’s mouth quirk up into the start of a smile. Unable to look at him, I bury my face in my hand as I mumble my reply.

“You’re...hard to resist, Kent. And we both know you use sex to manipulate me.”

Kent laughs a dark little laugh then. “Manipulate might be too strong a word, Fay,” he murmurs softly. I feel him trace his fingers over my knee then and I angrily swat his hand away.

“No touching,” I murmur, frustrated. Because – damn it, I’m trying so hard to hold onto my convictions – but I’m so happy he’s here – so pleased that he swallowed his own pride and made himself go all the way through the passage, to climb that stupid winding staircase – made himself make the trek he usually makes me take every night to be by his side.

But still. It’s not an apology. It’s not a sigh of trust. I steel myself and try to be newly determined to stay strong. Because my self-worth is worth more than what he’s offering. Especially now that I know just how much more I want.

“The light, Fay,” Kent says and I pull my hand away from my face to frown at him a little, confused.

“Why?”

“Because,” he says, giving me a little shrug. “If I’m going to confess all of my darkest secrets to you, it feels...more appropriate to do it with the lights off.”

## Chapter 148 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I stare too long at Kent in surprise and he rolls his eyes at me before shifting to reach over me towards the light, his body brushing against mine.

“Hey!” I snap, smacking at him and making him flinch back.

“What?” he asks, glaring at me again.

“No touching!” I say, pushing him back to the other side of the bed that now feels much too small. “I can get the light!”

“Well, you weren’t getting it, Fay,” Kent points out, but I flap my hand at him dismissively and turn to flick off the light. The room instantly plunges into an inky blue darkness and when I turn back to Kent I can only see his shadowy outlines on my bed.

“Better?” I ask.

“Yes,” he sighs, starting to lay down.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Getting comfortable, Fay,” he replies, and then I see his head turn towards me as he holds open an arm, inviting me to come closer.

“No. Touching.” I say through my teeth.

Kent sighs in exasperation in response. “Damn it, Fay,” he says, shaking his head and covering his face with his hands. “I have given in to everything you’ve wanted tonight. You didn’t want to come downstairs? I came up here. You wanted to hear the truth? I’m here to lay it out for you. Now would you please, please just let me fucking hold you while I talk, instead of glaring at me like an angry cat?”

A little angry about being put in my place like that, I scowl and rip away the pillow between us, tossing it onto the floor and angrily tucking myself in against Kent’s side, my cute flannel pajamas pressed up against the clean white starch of his dress shirt.

“Touching privileges will be revoked,” I murmur, “if you are a dick to me.”

“Okay,” he sighs, wrapping his arm around my shoulders and pulling me a little closer. Then, quite soft, he murmurs “thank you” before turning his head to bring his nose closer to me, sniffing my freshly-washed hair.

But I flinch away. “No funny business,” I murmur, wanting quite desperately to hold my ground but knowing that I will lose my head immediately if this goes any further.

“No funny business,” Kent agrees, sighing again and turning his face up to the ceiling so that I can see the clear outline of his profile against the dark of the room. “What do you want to know, Fay?”

I know my answer immediately. “I want to know what you’re sending to Italy. Is it...drugs?”

“No,” he replies without hesitation, apparently wanting to make it clear that he’s not holding anything back anymore. “It’s not heroin. It’s not any kind of drugs.”

“What is it?” I ask.

Kent sighs, lifting a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose again. “It’s...guns, Fay. Alessi asked me to send a great deal of guns to Italy so that they can...better conduct their business there. As you might presume, guns are harder to get in Europe than they are in America.”

“Oh,” I say, my eyes going wide as my body relaxes against his, my mind whirling. Because I feel, somehow, instantly better.

I don’t know why and I feel a little guilty that I do – it’s not like guns don’t hurt as many people as drugs do. But there’s just...something horrible to me about the idea of building a multi-million-dollar business on an industry that gets people hooked on a drug, drains them of everything they own in their further pursuit of that drug, and then leaves them to die when they’ve got nothing else to give.

Kent gives me a moment to process this, laying silent with his arm wrapped warm around me. “Kent,” I continue when I’m ready, my voice very soft. “Why didn’t you just tell me that? It doesn’t seem like that big of a deal.”

I see him shake his head a little. “Because, Fay. Like I said downstairs, you don’t need to know it.”

“But I do need to know it –“

“You don’t!”

“Kent!” I interrupt, frustrated again, smacking my hand against his stomach to make him listen to me. “Something is going down! Someone is trying to kill you, to kill us! And I want to help –“

“Fay,” Kent sighs. “There’s nothing you can do to help – I’ve got it handled. And even if you could help, I don’t want you to help.”

“Why not?” I ask, a little appalled.

“Because” he says, turning his face towards me. “I don’t want you involved in any of this – you or Daniel. I want all of this gone, dead, dusted. I don’t want you to know any of this because the more you get caught up in it, the dirtier you’re going to get, and the larger chance there is of you getting hurt. Or...kidnapped. Or fucking arrested, Fay.”

I blink in surprise. I never, ever considered that any of my connections to this could be...illegal. I mean. I haven’t done anything wrong.

Have I?

“Kent, I’m already involved in this,” I remind him softly. “I was born into this.”

“You were free of it,” he grumbles. “Your mom made sure of that. I’m the asshole who roped you back in.”

I bite my lip, realizing that’s true, but I shake my head anyway. “I don’t want out, Kent,” I say softly. “Not if it means...leaving.”

Leaving you, I finish in my head. But I’m not ready to say it yet.

“And I don’t want you to go,” he sighs, turning fully to me now so that we’re face-to-face, just inches apart on the mattress. “So, would you please just let me keep you out of it, Fay? It’s not – it’s not at all that I don’t trust you. I’m just – trying to end this, and it’s easier to do that if you and Daniel aren’t involved.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, unable to stop myself from reaching out a hand and laying it against his cheek. Kent turns his face into my touch, pressing into my palm. “What are you trying to end?”

“All of this, Fay,” he sighs, his body relaxing into the mattress now, almost as if his secrets were a weight on him. “I want...out of the world of crime. Completely. I want to go legit.”

“Really?” I ask, shocked. “Wh-why?”

“Are you so disappointed, Fay?” he murmurs, and I can hear the smirk in his voice. “Are you only attracted to me if there’s a hint of danger to it?”

“No,” I reply, laughing a little. “I just...never thought of you outside of it. Why do you want this?”

“I’ve wanted it since I was old enough to want,” he replies, his words distanced and thoughtful now. “Ever since I saw my father being murdered.”

I go cold as I remember Kent telling me that story, about watching his father bleed to death before him in a brutal mob hit. He had only been a child, and then was almost immediately sent away to Italy.

“I owed – we owed – the Bianci’s everything in exchange for what they did for me,” he continues. “And I gave it all to them – I gave them the business and the connections that they wanted when I came back to America, made them more money than they’ve ever had, gave them a grandson to inherit it all, gave them my god damn heart when I married Lenai –“

I go still a little when I hear him mention her, when he finishes his words angrily through clenched teeth.

Because I have to admit – on a night when I think Kent might be leaving me, the last person I want to think about is the woman I can never live up to. Lenai.

## Chapter 149 – Control

# Chapter 149 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“And I’m still giving everything to the Bianci,” Kent sighs, completely unaware of how jealous I am at the mere mention of his wife. “Twenty years – twenty years of building everything. And I swear to god – I’m almost out. I’ve almost paid my tab, I can feel it. Just...a little bit more, and then I’ll be free.”

“So, this is the end of it?” I ask after a moment. “The guns? Are the end?”

“I don’t know,” he murmurs. “It’s not like there’s a literal tab, Fay. It ends when I can...substantially make the case for breaking off the ties. That it will be more profitable for both of us if I stop meddling with crime and actually go legit. And I’ve been building that case for a long time – I have a lot of investments in tech and real estate, it should all work out. But,” he pauses, turning to me, “the Bianci’s aren’t easily convinced to give up their golden goose, are they?”

“No,” I say, nodding slowly, finally putting the final pieces of the puzzle together. “Which is why they’re pushing you so hard to marry Natalia.”

“Precisely,” he says, wrapping the arm beneath me a little tighter. “But my marriage isn’t on the table as a bargaining chip this time. Not anymore.”

There's a long pause before I ask my next question.

"Is that why you married her, Kent?" I ask, tentative.

"Partially," he replies after a second, and I think I hear a little relief in his voice to speak the truth.

"Oh," I whisper, surprised. "I – I thought you loved her."

"I did love Lenai, Fay," he replies, and I can feel him looking seriously at me. "I would never deny it – would never want to. She was incredibly important to me, and a good wife, and a great mom. But it was...complicated."

"Okay," I reply, not wanting to push him on this. And honestly, not sure I'll be able to bear it much longer, hearing him tell me about how much he loved another woman.

"Kent?" I ask after a long moment of silence. He makes a soft noise, urging me to continue. "You are sending guns to Italy now...but does that mean you aren't involved in the drug trade? At all?"

"No," he replies, "I don't. I leave that, ironically, to your father and your boy Ivan. I was able to convince the Bianci's a long time ago that drugs are dirty money and the business had too many eyes on it. And I was right - there was more to be made from slower, more subtle businesses. Do you want me to tell you what those are?"

"No," I murmur, letting my hand drift to his shirt, where I idly play with one of his buttons. "That's okay. Not tonight. But I reserve the right to ask later."

Kent murmurs his assent and another moment passes before he urges me on. "What else, Fay," he asks. "I want this done - I want peace between us. So, whatever you want to know, ask now – because I don't have the patience or the nerves to have this fight again."

I move closer to Kent then, tucking my head below his chin, pleased when he wraps his other arm around me and holds me close against him. "You said that you're legitimate now. But you had to start from scratch when you got back from Italy," I say quietly, thinking aloud. "Was it...was it very bad, Kent?" I ask. Honestly, I'm not really sure why I want to know. But as soon as I ask it, I know that I need to know what it was like.

"It was awful," he replies, resting his chin against my head as he remembers it. "Just...scraping on my knees trying to reignite the connections my father burned, taking insane risks to build trust, gambling everything on these reckless hits to build as much power and control as I could as fast as I could. And all with a baby at home." Kent sighs and tucks his forehead against mine. "It was...horrible. Some men have a taste for this world, Fay – I fucking hate it. I'm just good at it, because I was trained by the best."

I pull back then, looking him in the face, meeting his eyes as best I can in the dark. “Have you killed anyone, Kent?” I ask quietly.

“Yes,” he whispers instantly, giving me his honest confession. “More than you’d probably want to know, Fay. Innocent men as well as real scum bags. Cops, bosses, both sides. I’ve ordered hits and I’ve pulled the trigger myself. And...worse.” He sighs. “I have a lot of blood on my hands, Fay.”

I nod, letting him know that I hear him as my gut twists as I think about what Kent has done. Because it’s not that I didn’t know it. I just...it’s easier to suspect, I guess, rather than have it confirmed.

“Is that...does that change you feel about me?” Kent asks serious, carefully observing my face.

And I take a long moment to consider his question, wanting to be as honest with him as he’s been with me. And then, as I stare at him and really search my heart, I’m a little surprised to find that there’s no part of me that wants to run screaming from him now that I know this. And maybe it’s my mafia baby genetics, or the fact that I’ve been living in a mafia household for months?

But it doesn’t. It doesn’t change a thing about how I feel for him. Not at all.

“No,” I say simply, looking evenly into Kent’s face. “It’s not a problem for me. Unless...are you going to kill more people?”

Kent laughs then, a dark thing. “It’s not part of my agenda Fay, no.” He lowers his head to my neck then, running his nose and his mouth along the length of my skin there before pulling back a moment later. “I would, though,” he adds seriously. “You should know that. If anyone came to threaten you, or Daniel? I wouldn’t hesitate. I was born and raised to be a killer, Fay,” he continues, shaking his head regretfully. “You should...know that about me. It’s not something I can, or would, wipe away.”

I nod once, accepting it, and I slide my own hand up his neck and into his hair, letting my fingers tangle there as I pull him tight against me again, wanting him close. “Thank you,” I murmur, as Kent rolls his body over mine a little, letting his weight rest against me. “For trusting me.”

“I do trust you, Fay,” he murmurs, nudging my nose with his. “I wish you would trust me.”

I laugh up at him then. “Kent,” I say, shaking my head and smiling a little, “when you say ‘trust me,’ sometimes you mean ‘let me run your life for you.’”

“Yes,” he says decisively, sliding a hand up my arm and lifting it above my head, stopping only when he’s got my wrist pinned against the mattress. “That would be preferable, Fay. For you to cede me complete control.”

“Well,” I whisper, biting my lip as I look up at him in the dark, as I lift my leg to wrap around his hip. “Maybe...just for one night.”

And, after laughing darkly and shaking his head at my continued resistance and negotiation, Kent kisses me, his hand tightening against my wrist. And I let it go – all of it.

And I let him take control.

And Kent takes his time in convincing me that it was a very, very good idea.

Chapter 150 – Bright Light of Morning

## Chapter 150 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I wake up blinking to the chirping sound of Kent's phone and I groan a little as I turn over in Kent's arms. But when I look at his face, I grin to see that he hasn't woken up yet.

Apparently he really does need his wake-the-dead alarm clock to get him up in the mornings, especially after a night of confessions. I smile as I take in the sight of Kent's handsome face in repose. And then, slowly at first, I start to laugh as I take in the sight of him – this gigantic, fierce, scary man – wrapped up in my floral comforter, his feet hanging off the end of the bed that's too small for him.

Even though the alarm doesn't work my laughter clearly does, and Kent starts to open his eyes. Then, predictably, he glares at me. "What's so funny," he murmurs.

"You," I say, pressing my body closer to him as I smile. Then I lower my voice, doing my best imitation of him. "I'm going to have to send you through the passage now, Kent. Very busy day ahead of me. Take your coffee and go."

Kent smirks, giving me a half-hearted little smack on the ass before turning to reach for his phone, clicking the alarm off and turning back to me. "This is a lie," he sighs, wrapping his arms around me again and again pulling me tight against him. "You're not allowed to have coffee in your room, Fay. A constant supply of caffeine for you would be a danger to all society –"

I laugh, pressing my lips to his to shut him up. "But it would be so fun for me," I murmur. "You should do it, Kent. Give me a coffee machine for in here. Just a little baby one."

"Never," he murmurs, laughing with me as he softly strokes my hair and looks down into my face. He pauses for a long moment, just looking at me, and I can't help the wide smile that crosses my face as I look right back at him. Despite the fact that I spent half the night crying over him, I feel...closer now, to Kent, than I've felt before.

"Are we good?" he asks me seriously, his eyes flicking over my face to assess my reaction to his question.



“I think so,” I say honestly, looping my arms around his neck. “I’m okay. Thank you...for coming up here. For trusting me.”

“I’m still sorry,” he says softly, pressing his lips briefly to mine, “for making you think that I didn’t. And for...saying horrible things I didn’t mean.”

“I forgive you,” I say simply, and the words are easy because they’re true.

Kent opens his mouth to say something else but suddenly my bedroom door shudders, the handle turning. We both turn to look at it and my eyes fasten on the engaged deadbolt that prevents whoever is outside from getting in.

“Fay?” Daniel’s voice comes through the door. “Are you – are you okay? I wanted to check on you.”

“Well...this,” Kent murmurs, raising his eyebrows, “is an...unexpected role reversal.”

“Yeah,” I say, wrinkling my nose at him and starting to laugh. “You’d better get out of here before your son catches you sneaking into his place in bed.”

Kent wrinkles his nose at me in distaste and then looks down at the bed as he realizes that I’m right – that he is sleeping in Daniel’s spot. “Gross,” he murmurs before starting to stand up, and he sound so much like Daniel just then that I start to laugh harder.

“Fay?” Daniel’s voice comes from the door, sounding confused. He’s probably heard me laughing.

I open my mouth to respond but Kent gives me a glare as he pulls on his pants and grabs the rest of his clothing off the floor with one hand. Then he puts one finger to his lips to indicate that he does not want, at all, for me to tell Daniel that he’s here.

I nod to Kent, grinning, and call out to Daniel at the door. “One second, Daniel! I’m coming!”

Kent nods to me and then, for just a moment, stands still and lets his eyes slip over me where I sit naked in my bed, the sheets pulled up against my chest. And I can’t help but smile harder when I see the desire in his eyes. Our eyes meet and we both know what he’d be doing to me if his son weren’t at the door. But I just wave him off with one hand and start to stand up.

Kent sighs and heads through the wardrobe, pulling the door shut behind him as I grab my fluffy white robe off the floor, pulling it on before hurrying to the door to unlock it and pull it open.

“Hi!” I say, beaming up at Daniel cheerfully. And then I laugh harder as he frowns down at me, because he doesn’t know just how much he looks like his dad right now.

“Well,” he says, moving into the room when I step backwards to make space for him. “You’re...happier than I thought you’d be.”

“I got over it,” I say with a happy sigh, moving over to my vanity to sit down as Daniel shuts the door behind him.

“You did?” Daniel asks confused. “How –” but he goes silent as he looks at the bed, seeing the blankets mussed on both sides, the indentations in both pillows. “Oh gross, Fay,” he groans, making me laugh harder.

“Seriously!?” Daniel says, gesturing towards the bed. “He came up through the wardrobe? He slept here?”

“We were in a fight,” I say, giving a little shrug. “We...made up.”

Daniel pretends to gag as he moves to lean against the wall, apparently having no desire to sit on the bed until the sheets are changed. I grin at Daniel in the mirror as he shakes his head at me. “Well, you’re welcome,” he says, with a smug little shrug.

“What?” I ask.

“I went down and yelled at him last night,” Daniel replies, “after I left your room. He was all pissed off and determined to pull his lone wolf act, but I told him to talk to you. So, you’re welcome.”

I smile at him again, deeply this time, truly touched. “Thank you, Daniel. But...well, then this is your fault,” I say, nodding to the blankets. Daniel frowns at me and then, glancing at the bed again, he groans and tilts his head back as he realizes I’m right.

“I told him to be nice to you,” Daniel mutters, looking down at the floor. “Not to...nevermind, Fay. We’re changing the subject!”

And so we do. Daniel and I chat leisurely for a while, going about our normal morning routine, and I’m very pleased to see that things easily return to normal. I’m starting to feel lighter now – I’m back on good terms with Kent, I’ve had a good laugh with Daniel. It seems like the start of a very good day.

Before long, a knock comes at the door.

“Clothes,” Daniel says, interrupting the story he was telling me and heading to the door to receive our morning delivery. When he comes back into the room, though, I’m surprised to see a breakfast tray in his hands with a little white note on top as well as a bag which, presumably, holds our clothing.

“Oh,” I say, surprised. “What’s this?”

Daniel doesn’t reply, simply places the food on the desk and drops the bag to the floor, reaching for the note. He rips it open and quickly reads it aloud. “Breakfast in the room today – don’t

come down until noon. Please,” Daniel looks up at me in surprise. “Kent wrote please. What did you do to him?”

“Do you really want to know?” I ask innocently but he pretends to gag again and turns over the note, looking at both sides for more.

“Wish he wasn’t so cryptic,” Daniel murmurs, tossing the note back down on the tray and pressing down on the little French coffee press so that we can both have a cup.

“It’s part of his charm,” I sigh, reaching out a hand for the cup of coffee that Daniel’s preparing for me.

“If you two are going to be like this,” Daniel says, his voice wary as he passes his coffee cup over to me, “all disgusting and obsessed with each other —“

I burst into laughter as I take the cup from him. “That’s the second time you’ve said that, Daniel,” I say, shaking my head at him as I take my first delicious sip. “We’re not obsessed with each other —“

But Daniel just raises his eyebrow at me. “Seriously, Fay?” he asks, his voice disbelieving.

“What?” I say, lowering my coffee cup, not understanding. “Seriously, what?”

Daniel’s face breaks into a big smile then.

“You’d better tell me!” I shout, laughing now but also a little nervous. “What are you talking about!?”

“Fay,” he says, crouching down before me so that we’re eye to eye, his own coffee up balanced lightly between his hands. “Please, please hear me way I say this. I don’t know why on earth you haven’t figured it out yet, but Kent? He is obsessed with you.”